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ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA.

IF, as Emerson said, "All men love a lover," it may be said, with almost equal truth, all men love a house. For, on what foundations is the house built, if not on love and marriage, and is not the primal purpose of its roof to shelter lovers? The most beautiful house is not that on which art has most labored, embroidering it with her skill—carving it without and painting it within; but that which at once, and more and more with examination, shows itself fitted in its plan and by its proportions for human occupation and enjoyment. This is why, in every land, the cottage attracts the eye more strongly than the palace, or the substantial house of the rich man of the place; it expresses in simple forms, almost as by visible speech, the homely every-day needs and employments of its inhabitants, concealing nothing, disguising nothing. The kitchen, the wood-shed, the ironing-room, are in plain sight; the bread-oven swells from the wall as it were the life-giving breast of the house; the well, with its sweep or its pulleys, hospitably invites the passer-by with the prospect of a cool drink. A fastidious elegance has never taught the cottager to conceal the facts that cooking, baking, washing, and ironing, go on beneath his roof. No architect has sophisticated away his chimneys behind make-believe battlements, nor tempted his honest gutter to hide itself behind a senseless cornice. Even the smells of the kitchen, which in a city-house—often only the chimney by which these smells are carried off—are a constant offense, become appetizing in the cottage, where the kitchen has its right as a legitimate part of the building; and the odor of roasting coffee, baking bread, and even of roasting beef and mutton, are found in harmony, in their times and seasons, with roses and honeysuckles, when mixed, like these, with all the air there is beneath "the canopy." Did not Lord Bacon himself, most fastidious of mortals, praise the scent of

the honeysuckles "so that they be somewhat afar off"? And, who, on a fine day in spring or autumn, would object to seeing the "week's wash" hanging out to dry? Nausicaa always seemed to me a princess of the right stamp, she so enjoyed washing-day; and Homer, prince of poets that he was, had the eye to see how well the task became her and her maidens. And did not our own Thoreau—he, or some one with as little fear as he of an unconventional image—compare the clouds to the clothes of the Gods hung out to dry after an Olympian Monday?

The cottages and small houses of the last century—scattered, not infrequently, over the older New England States, particularly over Eastern Massachusetts, and found plentifully in New Jersey, not so plentifully in New York—are the true type of a domestic architecture fitted to our climate and to our general mode of living. No doubt, although they are built with few exceptions of wood, their original model could be found in England, a country the charm of whose rural building consists greatly in the fact that stone or brick is the material universally employed. With the exception of what are called half-timbered houses, I did not see in England a wooden house. In the older villages of Massachusetts, along the coast, it is as rare to find a house built of any material but wood. That the model the builders of these New England houses had in mind, and which they modified to meet their new wants, was a stone model, appears, however, wherever ornament is attempted, or the graces of "architecture" are sought to be added to the bare necessities of "building." And in the larger houses built by the earlier inhabitants, the whole external structure, and much of the internal fittings, is a direct imitation of stone-construction. Those familiar with the old town of Gloucester, in Massachusetts, will remember the handsome houses of Dr. Dale and Captain David Low—the former still standing, the latter unhappily gone—destroyed to head off an advancing fire that ate up half the town. The house of Dr. Dale was the more picturesque of the two; its well-balanced proportions, the perfectly domestic expression of the whole, showed a feeling in the builder that to-day cannot be found among builders at all, and is so rarely met with in architects, that I think I could number all the instances I ever knew on my thumbs. Other examples than those I have named will be familiar to my readers. Abundant illustrations of their general characteristics may be found in Mr. Arthur Little's "Early New England Interiors;" and

one example, that of the Cragie House at Cambridge, has an interest for all of us, as having been the headquarters of Washington while the army was in those parts, and later the life-long residence of Longfellow. The exterior of the poet's house had nothing to recommend it, but the internal arrangement and fittings were comfortable, dignified, and, in parts, picturesque. The entrance-hall, in particular, always seemed to me a model in its kind. With the exception of certain details, principally those of the chimney-pieces, there is little in these more pretending houses that can interest us or be of profit in our architectural studies. I might call attention to the thorough way in which all the work about them is done, were not this thoroughness a characteristic of the time, shown in everything, from the exquisite sewing of the women—an art as utterly lost out of the world to-day as if it had never existed—up to the framing of wooden church-spires, such as that of St. Paul's in New York, which stood a hundred years before it needed repairing. So well built are these large houses of the colonial time, that it is only from the æsthetic side they can be condemned for their servile imitation of stone-construction. Practically, they seem to be as enduring as if they were really made of stone, particularly where they have been well cared for. As houses merely—places where human beings can be healthily and comfortably housed—they are without fault; they have dry, large, well-built cellars and strong foundation-walls; they are built of sound, well-seasoned timber, scientifically framed, and without a single one of the miserable make-shifts that discredit modern carpentry; and the skeleton of the house once set up, the whole was covered with wooden sheathing, which, whether it was honest clapboarding or planks laid flat to imitate ashlar (the angles in many cases cut to imitate chamfered stone quoins), was always of the best material and workmanship. Within, they were well planned for comfort, and with ample provision for elegance; so that to-day, when life, directly the opposite of what it then was, is almost wholly external and given up to making a show, these handsome old-time rooms easily lend themselves as frames and background to the luxury of modern fittings and furniture.

But it is in the cottages and smaller houses of the colonial times, and of the times immediately succeeding the Revolution, that we find the best models for imitation or for suggestion. They were for a long time despised or simply neglected, while

we, in our callow youth, were going through our "classic" mumps and "gothic" measles, and near to perishing with the dreadful visitation of the "Mansard" malaria. But, within a few years, these houses have been rediscovered, as it were; their intrinsic excellencies are recognized, and borne in mind by a score of young, ambitious architects, who would make better use of their models if they were not egged on by their own ambition and by the demands of their clients to play so many fantastic variations on these clear and simple themes. Of course, no architect is expected to bind himself to the copying of one particular model, were it never so perfect. Nor could he do so if he would. The needs of no one time exactly resemble the needs of another, and it would be absurd to expect the late nineteenth century to find itself completely at home in the houses of the eighteenth, or even in those of its own earlier years. This, that we are living in, is a time of universal self-indulgence and love of ostentatious display; and how could such a generation content itself in the houses of its poor and ascetic ancestors?

But, while one generation differs from another in this, that, or the other superficial characteristic, all generations are alike in substantial, and it is in substantial that we can learn from the architecture of our forefathers. It was in a sense of proportion, of picturesqueness, and of comfort, that the old builders excelled; and it is in a sense of proportion, of picturesqueness, and of comfort, that our builders and architects are particularly wanting. There is, however, one important fact to be remembered. What we now are obliged to ask others to do for us, our forefathers used to do for themselves. We have no mention of the arrival of the first architect on these shores, but he was at least one thing that did not come over in the Mayflower. Better-informed persons than I am will know whether the old buildings of colonial and revolutionary times I have been praising were designed by professional architects, or were the work of mere builders; but I believe there can be no doubt that the handsome houses in Gloucester, Portsmouth, Hingham, Cambridge, and other Massachusetts towns,—the houses that made old New York so dignified a city, and those that still give to little Newport an air of consequence; or those, again, to which some of the New Jersey towns and cities owe their ancient aspect, that makes the frequent discoveries of mastodons and other fossils in the soil seem quite in keeping—there can, I believe, be no doubt

that all these houses were the work of simple "builders," who knew their trade and never cared to give themselves a finer name. And what is true of these houses and churches is also necessarily true of the cottages and small houses; for if architects had been needed to build the better sort of structures, the lesser sort would never have been so good as they are. The general excellence that marks the dwellings of any people is a proof of the non-existence of professional architects among that people. Where architects abound, the art of building always deteriorates. Did architects design the houses of Venice? Architects may have designed the bad ones, but never the good ones. As soon as architects got themselves fairly established in Venice, her shabby days began. But, to take more humble examples, consider the cottages of England, the chalets of Switzerland: is it not evident that they are the spontaneous outgrowth of a general good taste that stood in no need of "assisting." And even in England, where the profession of architecture, owing to the great patronage of the noble and wealthy classes and of the Government, has reached a high condition of skill and technical taste, everybody must have remarked the incongruity between its productions at the best and those of the older people, created before there were any architects other than clerical and monastic amateurs.

Every old church in England looks built by the same hands that built the old houses that nestle about it; or, rather, church and houses look as if they had not been built at all, but had grown, and grown out of one root. Let the best architect in England try to replace one of these old churches that may chance to have been destroyed, and, no matter how familiar he may be with the architecture of the period to which the old church belonged, the new one will look like an interloper.

It is to architects that we owe all the ugly building that offends us in our large cities and in our country towns and fashionable summer quarters. And I will grant that it is to architects that we owe, nowadays, the few, the very few buildings on which our eyes can look with any pleasure. The work of the professional builders is always in these days an eye-sore, but the builders simply follow the patterns set before them by the architects. A builder must call himself an architect before he can be employed in any important work to-day. The man—I forget his name—who built Mr. A. T. Stewart's house and iron shop, and

many a structure beside, was called an architect. Architects, too, are responsible for the churches on the Back Bay lands of Boston. An architect built the one with the foolish frieze of sculpture encircling the lofty, awkward tower, and wholly unintelligible from below! Costly sculpture—ugly and unintelligible, it is true, but costly for all that, and by Bartholdi, a man whose works seem by some fatality to have been unloaded upon this bedeviled land, as if we had not sculptors enough of our own, quite capable of work as bad! And this sculpture is put, as I say, at the top of a lofty tower, where no human eye, unless armed with spy-glasses, can make it out—a proceeding not easily reconciled with one's notions of Boston, where, if anywhere in the country, the laws of æsthetics and the limitations of the art are supposed to be understood, at least, if not spiritually discerned. And another architect built the church in that Back Bay quarter, dedicated, we suppose, to some female saint, since it has for emblem on the top the completest Saratoga trunk—to what end, unless an emblem, no mortal could ever tell me, nor I by my unaided wits discover. An architect also built the Art Museum, so finikin fine, with its heads of great men looking out of port-holes in the most shipwrecked fashion; a senseless treatment, although borrowed from that overdone Pavian Certosa, where so much is to be seen treated in an extravagant, ostentatious manner. This particular extravagance—medals run mad, as it were—seems to have taken hold of the fancy of certain of our architects; we find it repeated again in the Sanders Theater at Cambridge, and in the Historical Society's building in Brooklyn, where that good sculptor, Mr. Olin L. Warner, has been called on to design the heads of the shipwrecked personages. If I cannot like the outside of the Boston Museum, it is the outside alone that vexes me. Wholly pleasant are the contents, and the management every way creditable to Boston: a Museum of Art, with, actually, the collection of art-material its chief object, and a generous courtesy presiding over its management. But Boston has been as unfortunate in her architects as New York, though in quite another, and, it may be thought, in a more creditable way. The Museum of Fine Arts and the Memorial Hall at Cambridge, for instance, are examples of what comes of building getting into the hands of literary, critical men, art-students, with their heads crammed full of remembered bits of Old World architecture, and their portfolios

stuffed with photographs of more and more bits. Even "Trinity," the most effective piece of building yet done in America—and Mr. Richardson is one of the few men, alas! how dolefully few, who have the stuff of a real architect in them—even Trinity owes two-thirds of its external impressiveness to its tower, borrowed almost literally from the tower of the Salamanca Cathedral. Borrowing, borrowing everywhere; an original motive almost impossible to find. For the people at large have no ideas on the subject; the "builders" have been snubbed into taking a back seat and keeping it; and in architecture, as in all our fine arts, notably in the art of painting, the field has fallen into the possession of a set of clever, accomplished, but overcultivated young men who have come back from French and English studios, offices, and pedestrian trips, with a plenty of "material" in their sketch-books, much of it good in its own time and place, but, when worked up into houses for the average American, as alien to his mode of life, to his needs, and to his character, as can be conceived. Much fun has been made—and certainly too much fun could not be made—of the fact that the doors of Mr. Wm. H. Vanderbilt's house on Fifth Avenue are reduced copies of the gates made by Ghiberti for the Baptistery of Florence. The original gates, owing to the rooted defect of their design, to their multiplication of planes and of small parts, do not submit happily to reduction; and these Vanderbilt copies have a mean appearance, and are far from doing justice to the price that was paid for them. But, were they copies as perfect as could be made, the absurdity of their being where they are at all, would be no less; yet to this absurdity the architect of the house willingly lent himself, and art-writers, supposed to have reflected on the laws that govern art, have given their warm approval, in print, to this most tasteless proceeding.

In fact, the art of architecture has not received many worse blows in this country than have been given her by the three Vanderbilt houses recently erected in Fifth Avenue—two of them by architects of high reputation. Three such opportunities will not, it is likely, occur again for many years, and they have found our architects entirely unprepared for them. Mr. William H. Vanderbilt's house is the worst of the three, and though there is a story afloat that it is carried out in its present material contrary to the earnest wish of the architect, who had intended a light-colored stone to be used, it is not easy to see how that could have

made it look less like a gigantic knee-hole table than it does at present. What an incongruity between the coarsely executed, ill-designed band of foliage that belts the entire building—one slab the exact repetition of another, and all having the appearance of being stamped with a waffle-iron—what an incongruity between this machine-work and the borders of the famous gates of Ghiberti, with their charmingly varied designs of leaf, and fruit, and flower, and bird! Where is the profit, I must ask, in being a millionaire, if all one's money cannot command better design than this? And how discreditable to the profession of architecture in this country is the fact that a man with Mr. Vanderbilt's enormous fortune, and willingness to spend it, can find no better service than has been at his disposal in building this clumsy block!

It may be said that Mr. Herter is not an architect, properly speaking, but a cabinet-maker. Nevertheless, he is, I believe, a regularly trained architect, and he is certainly a man of varied accomplishments. But, whatever may be thought of Mr. Herter, no one will deny that Mr. Richard Hunt is an architect. And, as an architect, he has certainly loaded earth with some of the most ungainly among all the ungainly structures that make our streets such a misery to any one who cares for good building. He spoiled quiet Beacon street in Boston, enjoying her dowager respectable slumber in the shade of the Common elms, by the erection of the ugliest house that I believe has ever been built this side the Atlantic. He built the Lenox Library, with its silly pediments and blank monotony of wall—a very fit tomb, however, for the mummied treasures that are hermetically sealed within. Here again we see a very rich man powerless, with all his money, to get, artistically speaking, his money's worth. And now comes the Vanderbilt house, on which another fortune has been lavished, and what is the result? Nothing but a copy, and a slavish one, of the architecture of the time of Francis I., with its entrance an adaptation of a French Renaissance chimney-piece! There does not appear to be in all this pretentious, fussy building a single new motive; it has to the student the air of being nothing but a patch-work made up of bits whose original could easily be identified with a little search. Now, we laugh at the architect who, a few years since, was persuading us all to accept his designs for civil edifices and for private houses in the Norman style, the Perpendicular style, and the style of the Pan-

theon. But, on what grounds is it any more respectable to persuade a rich man to accept a design which is only a hash of French Renaissance detail, than to persuade a corporation into putting up a university building in the style of English perpendicular Gothic, or another to erect a prison in a parody of Egyptian architecture? But all such doings make us regret the days when we had builders whose common sense and correct eye could have saved us from being made ridiculous.

If I wished to make a complete survey of our blunders in architecture, I should need, not ten, nor a hundred pages, but an entire number of this REVIEW, for they meet us at every turn. From the gigantic folly at Albany—a problem with which men of original talent like Messrs. Richardson and Eidlitz have struggled in vain, and lost far more than they have gained in the hopeless task of bringing order out of chaos—from this discreditable undertaking, to the various examples of Mr. Mullett's conceit and ignorance, that make the Government a laughing-stock whenever it puts up a new post-office in any of our cities, or a new official building in Washington, there is really, to the most hopeful eye, very little outlook that is encouraging. Some relief had been hoped for with the advent of the group of young architects who were so cordially welcomed, and who have been rejoicing like little, wanton boys that swim on bladders, these last half-dozen summers, on a sea of glory. Of their cleverness there can be no doubt, nor that they have given many of our rich men prettier toys to play with than they could have been supplied with at any former shop. But, after all, we are beginning to find that the feast they invite us to is a feast of scraps, and that the strife seems to be with them, as with our women in the furnishing of their houses, who can invent the most startling novelty. After examining many of these fashionable houses, the impression is inevitable that what should be the true aim of the architect, the comfort of the occupants expressed with elegance, has been left entirely out of sight, and that the exhibition of the architect's ingenious fancy in the invention of "dodges," to be executed without the least regard to fitness or cost, has taken the place of the serious intellectual motives that ruled an older time. And the worst is that these offenses are perpetrated in the name of a style that was remarkable for simplicity and propriety in its ornamentation, and for the comfortable dignity of its plans and general design. It seems impossible for these young architects

to do anything quietly. They will not, if they can help it, let the eye rest for a moment anywhere. And they employ ornament in a way that cannot escape the charge of affectation. At all events, in nine cases out of ten, no reason could be given why this or that is what it is. Let any one attempt, for instance, to explain the ornamentation on the perron of the house lately built on the west side of Fifth avenue, just above Thirty-fifth street. If we met these cockle-shells and ribbons in a French château of Francis I.'s time, we should know that they were the device of some family; but what meaning have they here? and how tame must be the resources of a designer driven to the use of ribbons! The architects will, no doubt, have reason on their side if they throw a portion of the blame on the public. The public, they will say, insist on novelty, and encourage us, when we give them a little, to give them more. Great public buildings like the Produce Exchange are undertaken in a purely mercenary spirit, without a thought given to the intellectual credit of the corporation or to the elevation of the public taste. A carefully thought-out design, like that, for instance, sent in for our Produce Exchange by Mr. Withers, had no chance whatever—the drawings not even taken out of their portfolio, simply because the staircases were put in the only place fit for the staircases of such a large building, namely, at the angles. And a design that met with great favor was one in which the water-closets of the whole upper building were discharged through one of the iron columns that support the great main hall intended to accommodate the whole membership of the society! I could fill my paper with anecdotes of mismanagement like this, and the exposure might do some good. The builders of old time never made such blunders as these. They looked to the main things first—to light and air, comfort and convenience and hospitality. Too many of our architects look to all these essentials last.

CLARENCE COOK.